



# STATE OF IOWA

CHESTER J. CULVER, GOVERNOR  
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DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
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## A primer on food assistance (food stamps) in Iowa

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There has been a sharp increase in food assistance benefits in Iowa. Here are some trends.

- **Growth:** In November, the number of recipients rose 13.6 percent (now a record 279,069) compared to the same month a year ago.
- **Growth exceeds projection:** In September 2008, the Department of Human Services projected a modest (5.5 percent) annual growth in food assistance at the end of the fiscal year, from 256,812 recipients in June 2008 to 271,062 in June 2009. The growth from June through November 2008 is 8.6 percent.
- **Comparison nationally:** Iowa one-year growth of recipients is 13<sup>th</sup> largest in the nation as of September. Of adjoining states, only Wisconsin (7<sup>th</sup>) has greater growth. Only Alaska had a negative growth (minus 1.6 percent), while hurricane-ravaged Louisiana had a growth of 234 percent. National average is 17 percent. Iowa growth in this period: 13.1 percent.
- **Flood Impact.** Food assistance growth is largely driven by the economy, but record flooding this year was a contributing factor. To prevent loss of benefits due to destroyed documents or family dislocations, normal re-certification procedures were suspended for two months last summer, leading to increased food assistance participation. Regular re-certification procedures have resumed. Growth is continuing, although at a slower pace than in the flood aftermath.
- **Average benefit:** Average Iowa household monthly benefit is \$239, up 11 percent from year ago \$215. The increase was mainly caused by a national benefit increase beginning in October. Maximum benefit for a family of two is \$323. The average size of households receiving food assistance is slightly more than two people.
- **Eligibility** is primarily based on income and resources:
  - The income threshold is 130 percent of federal poverty levels, or maximum gross monthly income of \$1,517/month for a family of two.
  - The resource threshold (including bank accounts but excluding home and first car) is \$2,000/household. Resource thresholds are higher for elderly and disabled.
- **Are you eligible?** A simple four-question form online provides a rough idea of eligibility at <https://dhssecure.dhs.state.ia.us/yesfood/>. Actual eligibility forms are available at DHS offices or online at <https://dhssecure.dhs.state.ia.us/faweb/>. Interviews are required for all applicants.
- **Grocery spending:** Iowa food assistance customers spent more than \$30 million in November, a record. Food assistance benefits are 100 percent federal dollars. States and the federal government split the cost of administration.
- **Eligible population:** Iowa is serving an estimated 71 percent of eligible people (per USDA estimate for 2006), which ranks Iowa 20<sup>th</sup>. First is Missouri (reaching 98 percent of eligible people). Last is California (50 percent). Five years ago, Iowa was 39<sup>th</sup>.
- **Recent growth:** Iowa's growth in recent years has come despite relatively strong economic indicators. Among the reasons: Iowa DHS has simplified the application form, added online access, simplified reporting requirements, and eliminated paper coupons that stigmatized recipients.
- **Monthly Updates:**  
<http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/Partners/Reports/PeriodicReports/FoodAssistance/F1.html>

Questions?  
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